

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Approaches to language learning in recent years, favours reading as a method of acquiring language. Smith (1978) in writing about first language users argues that, “Children do more than learn to read through reading; they learn language” (cited in Elley, 1984).

This chapter looks at some definitions of reading and why it is important for ESL learners learn to read. As motivation is a powerful factor in reading, this chapter traces some of the studies done in the area. It also reviews the relationship between low proficiency and general reading ability. And finally this chapter concludes with a look at suitable texts for struggling readers.

#### **Definitions of Reading**

Reading is a psycholinguistic process that begins with a linguistic surface representation encoded by the writer and ends with a meaning constructed by the

reader. Essentially there exists an interaction between language and thought whereby the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought (Goodman, 1975).

According to the Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1971) the definitions of reading range from "to receive or to take in the sense of (as letters or symbols) by scanning", to "to understand the meaning of (written or printed matter) "to attribute a meaning or interpretation to (something read) (Bernhart, 1998).

Rupley and Blair (1989) assert that reading is a complex process which involves a group of skills and abilities arranged from the easiest to the most difficult.

### **Importance of Reading**

The importance of reading is aptly conveyed by Howes (in Villamin and Villamin, 1990). "Reading is the magic key to the world of enlightenment and enjoyment. It is the basic tool for learning in all subject area".

When there is little reading there will be little language learning. In the context of the samples of this study, the students come from non-English speaking home environment. For this reason they cannot pick up the language like the native speakers do or other second language learners from English speaking community. It is therefore

imperative for second language learners from non-English speaking homes to enhance their reading abilities so that they are exposed to the language more.

Strang's (1989) more global view of the importance of reading:

Reading is the key to communication and contributes to the solution of world problems of poverty and animosity. From a personal view point, reading is a key to continuing education, employment and enjoyment.

(in Rupley and Blair 1989: 3)

Eskey (1986) says that;

Reading ... must be developed and can be developed, by means of extensive and continual practice. People learn to read, and to read better by reading.

(in Day and Bamford, 1998: 9)

Krashen (1993) after many reviews of research studies in both the first language and second language, expresses that:

Reading is good for you. The research supports a stronger conclusion, however. Reading is the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar and the only way to become good spellers.

(in Day and Bamford 1998: 38)

And in reading literature books, readers can sharpen sight and insight, broaden sympathies and experience besides providing situations for readers to make rational judgement about human values in diverse conditions and settings. Reading is central and integral in the field of education in producing men and women capable of effecting correct responses to life. It disciplines our emotion, release tension and frustration as if we are part and parcel of the writers' creativity and imagination. This passes into life and gives it meaning (Bright and McGregor, 1976).

## **Reading Motivation**

### **Introduction**

A pervasive problem that many teachers are concerned with is motivating students to read. Veenman (1984) discovered that teachers ranked motivating students as a major concern. In another survey of teachers (O' Flahavan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl and Alvermann, 1992) found "creating interest in reading" was rated as the most important area that warrants emphasis in future research (cited in Gambrell et. All. 1996). Since the value of motivation is highly placed by teachers, there are studies in the research literature which link between motivation and achievement (Elley, 1992; Gambrell & Morrow, in press; Guthrie, Schafer, Wang & Afflerbach, 1993; Purves &

Beach, 1972; Walberg & Tsai, 1985; Wixon & Lipson, 1991). The findings of these studies revealed the need to increase our standing of how children acquire the motivation to develop into active engaged readers (cited in Gambrell et.all 1996).

### **Research on Reading Motivation**

Many studies support the contention that literacy learning is influenced by various motivational factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Eccles, 1983; Ford, 1992; Kuhl, 1986; Lepper, 1988; Maehr, 1976; Mc Combs, 1991; Wigfeld, 1994; cited in Gambrell et.all 1996). Eccles (1983, cited in Gambrell et. all. 1996) propounds as 'Expectancy value' theory of motivation, which says that one's expectation of success or failure of a task influences one's motivation. Other studies supporting Eccles' theory, found that students who believe of their capabilities as competent readers are more likely to perform better than those who do not hold such beliefs (Parris & Oka, 1986; Schunk, 1985 cited in Gambrell, et. all. 1996). Students who perceive reading as beneficial and crucial and possess reasons for reading will read in a more disciplined and effortful manner (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Paris & Oka, 1986, cited in Gambrell et.all. 1996).

Other research on motivation by Ford (1992) and Winne (1985) has been grounded on the expectancy value theory. Ford (1992) maintains that people will aim to

achieve the goals they value and perceive as achievement. Winne (1985) views the idealized reader as someone who feels competent and perceives reading as being of personal value and practical importance.

Gambrell (1996) and her colleagues who were involved in the Literacy Motivation Project at the National Research Centre and the work of other researchers (Oldfather, 1993; Ruddell, 1995; Turner, 1995; Turner & Paris, 1995 cited in Gambrell, 1996). contend that classroom cultures which foster reading motivation are characterized by a teacher who is a reading model; a book-rich environment with opportunities for choice; familiarity with books; social interactions about books and literacy related incentives that reflect the value of reading.

Teachers have for a long time recognised what makes a good teacher. Enhancing literacy learning of our students is not a simple task but we can make a difference in their literacy lives if we can be reading models and motivators. For those students with negative literacy learning experience would therefore need much more encouragement and learning strategies to become autonomous readers.

## **Low Proficiency in Relation to General Reading Ability**

### **Introduction**

A growing assumption amongst ESL teachers in the reading achievement of second language learners is restricted due to their low proficiency in that language has initiated many research in that area.

### **Research and Outcome**

Alderson, Bastein and Madrazo (1997, cited in Devine, 1988) in their study on Mexican subjects reading in Spanish (first language) and in English revealed a significant correlation between English proficiency and reading comprehension of an English text. This inevitably led them to conclude that language competence was the best prediction of reading achievement. In another study, Aron's (1980, cited in Devine, 1983) findings supported the conclusion of Alderson's team.

In her study of the relationship between second language proficiency and oral reading performance, Devine's (1988) results showed a positive correlation between gains in language competence and the use of effective reading strategies (oral reading

and comprehension strategies). However, Devine reaffirms that for language instruction to impact on second language, reading instruction should integrate all the skills.

Berman's (1984) investigation on how a knowledge of syntactic features of a language is essential for 'Unravelling of parts of sentences and correct perception of their grammatical and rhetorical interrelation', for general reading fluency confirmed that a knowledge of syntax (achievement of a level of language proficiency) enhances second language reading ability. Studies by Cooper (1984) and Field (1985) and Cohen et. al (1979) cited in Devine (1988) affirm the relationship between poor reading ability in second language and inability to handle the syntactic features of that language.

While the above research findings showed a correlation between language competence and reading ability, other researchers have also looked into the relationship of reading with listening, speaking and writing. Ruddel (1996, cited in Harris & Malmquist, 1973) states that reading is positively correlated with all other aspects of verbal communication, the highest with spelling and lowest with formal grammar and with (Strom, 1956 in Harris & Malmquist) handwriting. So if a low proficiency learner were strongly motivated to improve his or her reading competence, then it would be logical to anticipate a positive development in the whole language generally.



## **Texts for Struggling Readers**

### **Introduction**

For most struggling readers, literacy learning often begins with word learning difficulty, compounded by unsuccessful learning experiences and the issues of self-respect (Mc Cormick, 1994 cited in Worthy, 1996). Hence, to regain positive self-concept, learners must be motivated through 'successful experience' (Mealy, 1990). This means that learners must experience comprehension and enjoyment in their reading.

### **Interest; Language Experience and Picture Books**

The literature suitable for these learners, in addition to its readability, is interest. When students have great interest in what they read, they can transcend their so called reading level (Hunt, 1971). Interest is of paramount importance in learning (Dewey, 1913; Hidi, 1990; Schiefele, 1991).

In developing the literacy learning of struggling learners, they benefit from shared reading experiences with teachers and peers (Holdaway, 1979), in materials that

provide both repetition (Mc Cormick, 1994 in Worthy, 1996) and a low rate of reading errors (Gambrell, Wilson & Gantt, 1981). Other kinds of meaning-centred, literature based instruction are also advantageous to struggling readers. They include the use of language experience, dictation, pattern and predictable texts, familiar song lyrics, poetry and rhymes (Worthy & Invernizzi, 1992; Zucker, 1993 in Worthy, 1996).

Another way of promoting reading is to use picture books in particular, in teaching social studies concepts to elementary and middle school students (Farris, 1993 in Farris & Fuhler, 1994). Picture books present memorable social information about people's actions, influence students' language and communication acquisition and promote the assimilation of content area knowledge (Levstik, 1980 in Farris & Fuhler, 1994). The pictures provide detailed information that is often not found in the text (Benedict & Carlisle, 1992). Secondly, picture books lend themselves to presenting difficult or sensitive concepts to students in a more comprehensible manner. And thirdly, picture books can arouse students' curiosity. Sebesta (1989) in (Farris & Fuhler, 1994) asserts that curiosity is an important element to promote reading. Stewig (1992 in Farris & Fuhler, 1994) contends that children's books allow students to 'learn more about other cultures'.

To foster reading amongst struggling readers, it is therefore essential to expose a wide selection of books for the learners to choose the materials that interest them. It is also vital to provide opportunities for them to talk to their peers about what they are

reading. They should realise that personal interest is an important factor in selecting a book to read for pleasure - not readability or someone else's view of what is worth reading.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the review has indicated that generating interest in reading is a major and crucial factor in getting students to read. The task is even more demanding and daunting for the teacher when the students are low proficiency learners, lacking in literacy experiences. In addition, the studies have also shown that literacy learning is influenced by various motivational factors. As such to enhance the reading ability of these learners would require the teacher to observe strategies or solutions implemented. Such a classroom- based research should appropriately be action research, a methodology which involve the teacher as the researcher. Action research is ideal because it entails action (by the teacher) observation, reflection, planning and revision of a strategy implemented to overcome a particular problem. Essentially, action research is practical because it allows classroom teachers to improve the learning of the learners as well as to improve their own practice.